

# Maurice Hinchey NEWS

## 26<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT, NEW YORK

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### HINCHEY URGES PROTECTION OF FINGER LAKES NATIONAL FOREST

WASHINGTON - U.S. Representative Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today wrote to the U.S. Forest Service to urge that the Finger Lakes National Forest be protected from oil and natural gas exploration and drilling. In a letter to Forest Supervisor Paul Brewster, Hinchey expressed his objections to the preferred alternative outlined in a draft environmental impact statement.

"Since being established by an act of Congress in 1983, the Finger Lakes National Forest (FLNF) has become a popular destination for hikers, campers, horseback riders, and nature enthusiasts," Hinchey wrote. "Opportunities for hunting, fishing, skiing, and snowmobiling ensure that the FLNF is used by citizens throughout the year. Visitors are attracted to the FLNF because of its network of trails, easy access, and relatively undisturbed environment. Oil and natural gas exploration and extraction activities in the FLNF would greatly diminish the benefits many of my constituents enjoy when visiting the FLNF."

The FLNF Oil and Gas Leasing Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) presents a number of alternatives. Alternative #2, which the DEIS designates as the preferred alternative, would allow surface drilling in up to one seventh of the FLNF. While the DEIS indicates that the FLNF hosts 46,000 recreational visitors a year, it does not adequately address the impact that drilling will have on the number of visitors or on the quality of their experience.

"I believe that a stronger attempt needs to be made to quantify the FLNF's value to its users," Hinchey's letter continues. "Such an analysis might examine how recreational use would be diminished by the effects of drilling, such as increased traffic, noise, fumes, damage to roads and trails, and risk associated with extracting and transporting oil and natural gas."

Hinchey also expressed doubt that the current increase in demand for natural gas would be sustained in the long term. He speculated that with the stabilization of energy costs, drilling activities would no longer be cost-effective and would be halted soon after they began. In this scenario, the FLNF would be despoiled and no benefit would come from it.

The U.S. Forest Service is accepting public comments on the DEIS until August 1. Comments should be mailed to Paul Brewster, Forest Supervisor, U.S. Forest Service, 5218 State Highway 414, Hector, NY 14841.